



# The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

● OCTOBER 1994

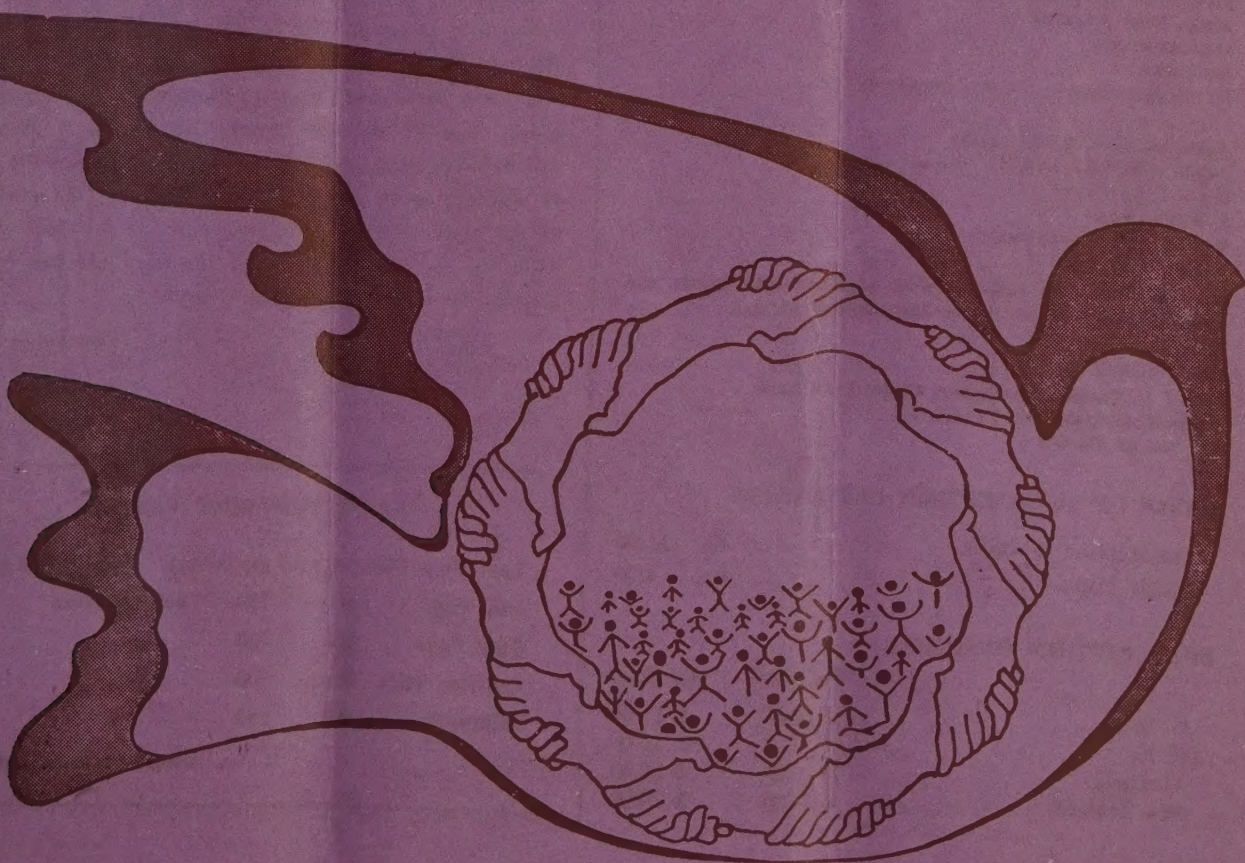
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**"I in them, and thou in me, that they  
may be made perfect in one"**

John : 17-23





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*Opinions expressed by contributors do not commit the C.S.I.*

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*The Magazine of the Church of South India*

**OCTOBER 1994**

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**All remittances and communications regarding subscriptions and advertisements to be sent to the Hon. Business Manager.**

### HON. AGENT IN U.K.

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**Bucknell, Shropshire SY 7 0AH, UK**

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### RATES OF SUBSCRIPTION PER ANNUM

Subscription in India .. .. .	Rs. 35.00
Single Copy .. .. .	Rs. 4.00

### SUBSCRIPTION OVERSEAS

	<i>Sea Mail</i>	<i>Air Mail</i>
U. S. A. .. .. .	\$ 10.00	\$ 15.00
U. K. .. .. .	£ 5.00	£ 10.00
Australia .. .. .	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00
New Zealand .. .. .	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00

## 25 Years Ago!

ONE BODY — In the Epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul Speaks, not only of 'one spirit' but of 'one body'. What does he mean? He is not, as it were, thinking of Baptists being nice to Lutherans but rather of former Anglicans, Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians living together in one church. He is not thinking of so-called spiritual unity, but of organic unity, as the basis of spiritual unity. He is thinking both of the spirit and of the body. For him, organic unity is not an optional extra for the church; it is of the very essence of the church. No organic unity, no Church!

— Churchman 1957

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<b>Last Page (4th page of the cover)</b>	<b>Rs. 12,000 p.m.</b>
<b>Full Page</b> .. .. .	<b>Rs. 750 per insertion</b>
<b>Half Page</b> .. .. .	<b>Rs. 400 "</b>
<b>Quarter Page</b> .. .. .	<b>Rs. 200 "</b>
<b>Minimum</b> .. .. .	<b>Rs. 150 "</b>

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# Tribal Christians, Jewels of the Church

Recently, I had an opportunity to interview Rev. D. Elias, one of the pioneer missionaries of the diocese of Kanya Kumari working among the tribals of Kalrayan hills in the north Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. Earlier, I had spent a couple of days in Khamman, Dornakal diocese, with Rev. S. Luke Moses, his wife Mrs. Pushpa Moses, Mrs. Annahamma and Mrs. Suguna who had returned from a tribal area. In fact it was a team of women's fellowship which made an adventurous trip to a remote place in the dense forest of Orissa. With the help of local people they even constructed a church in a place called Banda. There are atleast half-a-dozen dioceses in Church of South India which have such outreach programmes, specially working among the tribals — adivasi or original inhabitants will be an appropriate term. They are also known as 'forest dwellers' and it is estimated that there are about 67 million tribals are there in India. These are the ones who are mostly being exploited. After listening to the stories of our missionaries and occasional visitors I have developed a feeling that church in India has a special mission for these neglected lot of our country.

My pastoral ministry among Lambadies and experience with different tribal groups in the diocese of Dornakal have enriched my personal insights. The nuances of each tribal group have been sources of stimulating challenges for many churches, calling for innovative and developmental approaches to the groups. Some how, the main-line Churches are slightly complacent about the ministry for these people But the other individuals and groups are thriving upon the so-called tribal mission. Here we need to caution ourselves, as the feelings of the tribals are deeply wounded since no genuine, visible, liberation or development is seen anywhere. On the other hand it is a wholesale exploitation.

These tribals are isolated in some of the remote areas and preoccupied with their daily struggle for sheer survival. Their encounter with the others have generally been unpleasant. Physical, economic and cultural encroachments by 'mainstream' society into their homelands have shattered their traditionally cooperative, environmental — friendly lifestyles and eroded their remarkably rich cultural heritage. In the name of development and environmental protection governments have sent them out of the forests that had been homes

to them since time immemorial and displaced them from their traditional homelands. They are rudely uprooted from their places; their community life is disrupted; became rootless and impoverished refugees in their own land. In fact, they donot have the concept of owning Land. They say how can we own our mother. They get little out of the huge grants allocated for them. It is said that 60% of the grants are being spent on office, office-staff, maintenance of the vehicles ect. What the tribals get is mere pittance. Having robbed them of their ancestral homelands, denuded their forests and destroyed their sources of livelihood, modern society leaves them to wallow in acute poverty and misery. Higherups believe that the tribals are meant only to be trotted out to lend colour to various cultural programmes like the festivals of India, with their exotic costumes and energetic dances.

'Modern' religions did not help them much. Tribal religion has been described as animism or spiritism. Tribal villages have their own gods and spirits, who guard and protect villagers from disease and natural calamities. These are intimately related to nature. The strong trend of Hinduisation of tribals throughout India is a threat to the ethnic identity and culture. Tribal deities have been uprooted and replaced by Hindu gods in many places. Traditionally, tribals do not have temples or idols. Their sacred places of worship have been converted to 'bhajan mandirs' where they have been reduced to peons.

In my honest opinion, the brand of Christianity that was preached to them, also didnot help them. Factions, divisions, casteism, class differences, in one word, the lifestyle of church doesn't inspire them. Church needs to re-examine its methodology and approach.

One should make an in deapth study about their plight now, and appreciate their style of life, the culture, rich and more holistic than that of the 'mainstream' culture, which encompasses an extremely sophisticated, yet simple administrative, legal, economic, medical social and religious system. It is good to have a separate department or wing for a constant touch with these people. Here is a chance for us to communicate the gospel in an indigenous form, without hurting their style of life. Then, surely, the tribal christians become the jewels of the Church.

— DASS BABU



## Discovering a neighbour, on a Sunday Morning!

We were at a friend's place. I was not well enough to go to church, nor ill enough to stay in bed. Our friends and their friends had been to morning service. It was one of those rare days when a Bishop didn't have to preach a sermon. The three adults and five children returned home and were watching Sun TV. After some time I said, 'let us do a Bible Study!' The children ran and brought their Bibles. The theme of the day was 'love towards neighbour'.

The sudden inspiration came to me because that morning I remembered my former colleague and friend Dr. Hans Reudi Weber, Bible Teacher *par excellence* whose participatory Bible Studies I found very useful and enjoyable. One of the best Bible expositions in this respective 'The Gospel in Solentiname', a collection of group reflections by the fisher folk in solentiname village in L. America, facilitated by Ernesto Cardinal who later became the Minister of Culture in Nicaragua. I would strongly commend these 4 volumes for your reading.

But I never had done such informal study with an intimate group. Any way, we started to read Luke 10:25 by turn. 'Oh! this is the good Samaritan's story' — Cheruba said, Praveena (13) asked 'where does it say 'good Samaritan'? We searched the text carefully. There was no adjective given to the Samaritan. So, I suggested, you know this story so well, what title shall we give? Priyanka's (7) was acceptable to all. We summarised it; 'The unlucky victim of robbers who was luckily found by a neighbour!'

'Uncle, why do you think the priest and the catechist didn't stop and help'? Some one noted Sanu (6) jumped to answer; 'Either they were late to church or they were scared', 'Nó', Divya (12), said, 'they were wicked people with no concern for the wounded'.

I explained the nature of relationship between Jews and Samaritans, comparing it with some Orthodox Brahmins and dalits in our villages. They don't eat together, nor touch each other, nor even walk together! 'But in our class we all play together and eat together' corrected Cheruba. 'Yes, that is very good', one of the parents commented.

We then examined the context of the parable.

The lawyer asked, Jesus how he could gain eternal life. This parable was Jesus' answer to that question. I asked them to look at the different translations! 'everlasting life', 'life for ever'. What can that be? I queried. 'Life

in heaven; my father died recently, and I believe appa is there', Cheruba was very sure.

'Shall we look at what the Bible says'. Praveena read John 17 : 3. 'To know God and his son Jesus Christ is life eternal' 'I said, 'know' in original means to know intimately, to love, to obey; so how do we know God? 'When we pray, when we love and when we obey Him, Priyanka was quick. That is excellent. If so, when does everlasting life begin? Now, right here! I said we enter eternal life here and enter into its fullness in heaven. 'Uncle, then if we don't pray to God, if we don't love him, we can't have eternal life here or after death, right? 'You've got it' I said.

Now let us look at what the Samaritan did to the man on the road side. It is an action packed sentence. Love is always action, not just feeling. He saw, moved with pity, went up, bandaged the wounds, dressed him with oil and wine, lifted him to his beast brought him to the inn, looked after him, paid money etc. That the Samaritan himself spent the evening and night with the sick man was extremely kind of him. Now how can we be neighbours? 'When we help somebody in the road help a grandma to cross the road, or give some money to a stranger who asks' they chorused together. 'No, there are so many robbers on the street, so children should never talk to strangers', a worried mother cautioned. 'Yes Amma is correct. Till you grow up, you have to be careful, specially, if you are alone.'

But what more can we do? Praveena said, 'My appa is a doctor in a private hospital. Many accident victims come here. Government hospitals don't give enough care. Other private hospitals don't want to take the trouble of going to court and give evidence, and lose their money making time...' The bank officer mother said, 'your father is really a marvelous neighbour to those victims'. 'But uncle, my father also is a good neighbour' Sanu, Divya's little friend said. He pleads in the court for compensation for the accident victims. He takes only a small fee. 'He is a good neighbour', the Doctor's wife certified. Wonderful! We have in our own homes two good neighbours. Now, shall we close this session with a prayer?

Divya prayed 'Lord Jesus, help us to know you better and thus have eternal life, and help us to help others.' Amen.

— Sam Amirtham  
Bishop



# Review of the Management of Human and the Material Resources of the Church

MR. P. ROBERT GURUSWAMY *Madras*

Departmentalisation of concerns and decimation of duties have unfortunately led to pigeon-holing of functions: the reality of the harmony of over-all perspectives is often lost sight of. The sad tendency has not spared the church. We generally miss the integral unity between spirit and body, preaching and resource-management, church life and church administration. Labelled, rather anathematically as 'finance', management of men and materials is often rated low and the men in charge of it are usually feared to be prone to spiritual bankruptcy. In fact 'finance' is equated with Mammon and the finance officer with Judas. All this may perhaps be the result of the rampant materialism of modern times and of the rather cowardly disengagement of the spiritually minded people from all that is 'material'.

The Biblical understanding of stewardship is far different. It is comprehensive and noble. A steward is a trustee of God whose job is to manage the Master's affairs, care for His receipts and expenditure and give out the proper portion to every member of His flock. His control is more or less absolute when he oversees His master's affairs in His absence. In fact, in Christ's teaching, all of us are God's stewards and our trust covers (a) ourselves, because we belong to him (b) our time, means and opportunities which are granted by Him : and (c) others who are given to us to serve. It is, therefore, the duty of steward to 'manage' charges left to him in trust with most watchful fidelity and utmost efficiency. As this duty pervades the whole life of the church it is required of us, stewards, to be disciplined in body, mind and spirit. This demands care of the body, training of the mind, culture of the emotions and discipline of the will. This in turn requires the most effective utilisation of time, influence, opportunity and money in the wisest possible way. Christian stewardship goes further in helping and urging others to do the same. In short, it is found in one's planning of one's probable life as a whole that it may subserve God's purposes by effectively turning every created thing-be it endowed or given to God's advantage and glory.

It is such an understanding of stewardship that Christ's teaching does reveal. The labourers in the vineyard are a warning against the human tendency to put material returns above the service rendered on trust. The prodigal son provides warning against wealth being wrongly used. The wicked husbandmen typify breach of trust in the management of the master's estate. The parable of the talents emphasises industry and right and efficient use of opportunity and God-endowed excellence and skills.

It is, therefore, essential for us to widen our perspective of stewardship. Stewardship is not narrowly confined to the augmentation of income and budgeting of expenditure alone. While it may be immediately concerned with these, it is not rooted in them. The roots of stewardship are to be found in the acquisition, in present-day church context, of an overall perspective of God's vision for the world and in the urgency of so stewarding as to capture and realize such a vision. This will presumably involve, in terms of operation, the shaping of policies of church government as integral to marshalling of resources. In other words, a truly great financial wizard of the common parlance, with all his sophisticated equipment of financial operation, will be a misfit as a steward within the church if he is not at the same time well informed of the vision and art of church Government. Both these qualification may still render him useless if he is not also a man of superb integrity and character. That which is important in commerce is only relevant to stewardship. Christian stewardship cannot be divorced from the operation of faith in God and responsible functioning in that faith.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE USE OF THE MATERIAL RESOURCES OF THE CHURCH

Changing patterns of life made their impact on the functioning of the church. In ancient times, people worshipped God in forests and met as groups under trees to open their hearts for spiritual nourishment. When life became sophisticated and work specialized, the church also had to reorganise itself and become formal and businesslike. We may trace the history of finance and other materials back to Moses who spoke to all the community of Israelites.



This is the command of the Lord has given : Each of you set aside a contribution to the Lord. Let all who wish, bring a contribution to the Lord : gold, silver, copper (Exodus 35:4 & 5). The whole community of the Israelites went out from Moses' presence, and everyone who was so minded brought of his *own free will* a contribution to the Lord for the making of the Tent of Presence and all its service and for the sacred vestments.

(Exodus 35:20 & 21)

Moses organised this Finance/Materials (thank offering in cash and kind) campaign for the construction of the sanctuary. Each morning the people brought offerings until the building engineers and supervisors reported to Moses that the offerings had *exceeded* the requirements, and Moses informed the people of the situation, and *asked* them not to send any more contributions. A beautiful tabernacle was built to house the Ark of the Covenant which was overlaid with pure gold inside and out. It is noteworthy that Moses at first made a policy decision and then sought for resources to carry it out. Once the decision was carried through the resources are not grasped for their own sake. The spiritual matches the material and not vice versa.

Perhaps the most dramatic campaign for funds in ancient days (B.C. 1014) was for the construction and dedication of Solomon's temple. Our minds and hearts are touched when we read the report in Chapters 5 and 6 of the First Book of Kings. Materials were gathered from far and near. The most experienced architects and skilful craftsmen were engaged in large numbers. The wealth that was gathered for the entire enterprise astounded foreign rulers. Much more exciting was the Service of Dedication when all the people of Israel gathered with King Solomon before the Ark 'sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be told nor numbered for multitude' (1 Kings 8 : 5) Solomon preached a sermon and prayed, followed by his presenting a sacrifice of peace offerings of 22,000 oxen and 1,20,000 sheep.

The above reports of 'Thank offerings' indicate the preparation and implementation of 'Master Plans', the strength of organization and the extent of sacrificial giving. More than the carrying through of the plans the spiritual fervour of the people and the wise marshalling of the resources by the King affirm the totality of the spiritual experience of the nation.

Coming down to the New Testament period, it is clear that Jesus apparently did not have any financial problem as he rendered his services freely to people. He did not undertake extensive programmes through organisations, and he did not own or maintain any property. However, his disciples managed their treasury and faced the problem of finance that led to argument at times. Judas was almost de facto treasurer who had resorted to

the most indecent and treacherous speculation that led the greatest tragedy in human history. Some people seek to continue this historical tradition owing to lack of personal commitment and professional competence, owing to pressures of church 'politics' and absence of an adequate management system with built in-controls. They mar the image of the church and its institutions. Perhaps Judas is a warning against the purely materialist's planning for economic development. He betrayed his trust at transgressed the limits of human decency when he perverted community planning into one of personal or selfish aggrandisement.

St. Paul was a campaigner of great reputation. Asking nothing for himself, as he earned his livelihood by a trade he was not only a great preacher and pastor but he spent much time in organising congregations, raising funds and promoting service programmes. He charged the elders of the Church of Ephesus 'we should keep in mind the word of the Lord Jesus who himself said,' 'Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving' (Acts 20 :35).

Congregations in the early church worshipped, witnessed and served the community at large and helped in spreading the message and forming new congregations through systematic giving and sharing and through organizational structures that were relevant and suitable to the socio-economic conditions of the Christian community and also of the community at large.

'Sacrificial giving and not "collection" continued through the Middle Ages especially in Europe and some parts of Asia, towards the construction of cathedrals and chapels. Apart from receiving and spending enormous amounts of money for the purpose of building places of worship men spent their whole life time seeking to perfect the delicate colouring and designing of the stained glass windows, carving the stones, painting panels or constructing exquisite mosaics to adorn walls, ceilings and floors. Many people offered themselves to be harnessed like beasts of burden to transport the material needed for building the church. The people of the Middle Ages gave eagerly of their wealth and their talents for the glory of God. Many of them did not live to see the structures they helped to build. Later on 'Giving' became mechanical and ritualistic and this gave room for corruption in the church. Giving today, in most places, is no longer person involved — it is a little better than the monthly club subscription.

Reviewing the Missionary Era in India commencing from the arrival of Bartholomew Ziegenbalg on 9th July 1706, one cannot miss the sacrificial giving of the missionaries. Many of them offered themselves as willing victims to bad climatic conditions, infectious diseases and violence. And congregations grew rapidly because of the sacrificial giving. With their systematic teaching of stewardship the congregations gave themselves along with



their talents, time and energy for the spread of the gospel. Though the congregations depended heavily on the financial support that came from Missionary Societies, the style of operations which was marked by accountability, responsible spending, openness, professional competence and sacrificial giving promoted a sense of satisfaction and credibility among the people. There was a total involvement of the missionary and his congregation in planning for achieving church growth in terms both of spiritual and material concerns. For this reason investment in education and health has registered record returns in terms of subsequent development of leaders and institutions in the country. This encouraged the growth of a meaningful stewardship. Church structures (denominations) were comparatively small: qualified and experienced missionary and Indian workers administered the congregations and institutions with meticulous care, and any mismanagement was detected in time and errant men were severely dealt with. The former Anglicans (SPG and CMS) and Presbyterians (CSM) did pioneering work in building suitable organisational structures especially in the fields of educational enterprise, financial management and evangelism. The Methodists and the Congregationalists rendered specialized services in the major field of Ministry viz., Rural nurture.

With the rich heritage of 241 years of Missionary work, the Church of South India came into being on that great day of 27th September 1947, 'Self Reliance' became the target of this new Church which wanted to express its selfhood in varied aspects of its life and work. The CSI has been successful in this venture. Success was not without problems. Though self-reliant, the CSI had some weaknesses that were more often blown up from within than elsewhere. Centralised administration made for less personal involvement and church politics arose from the type of elections preferred. This came in the way of choosing really committed and competent men and women for positions of responsibility. It is these unfortunate weaknesses that are responsible for the weakening of the witness of the Church.

## THE MAIN THRUST OF STEWARDSHIP

**A. Giving is not gift but Obligation — Integration of Human and Material resources.**

Many people have the wrong impression that they make sacrifices for the church while they actually give just enough to keep their self-respect and that 'salvation is free' because 'Jesus has paid for it fully'. The church is not a club asking for subscription for its pastimes nor a polity demanding taxes for its services, but it is the expression of the Body of Christ that calls for worship, witness and service. By the very nature of his life and work by faith, a Christian is obliged to give. He is not giving to an institution but to the Body of Christ expressed

through an institutional structure of which he is an integral part and his giving a necessary sustenance. Christ offered himself for people and in turn He is calling people to offer themselves. Every Christian is obliged to give over and above the tithe. There is, at times, a wrong notion that a member is 'giving' to the Presbyter, the Pastorate Committee, the Diocese or Synod. The fact is he is obliged to give to Christ. There can be no Christian giving where it does not involve suffering or sacrifice.

This obligation is an offering in gratitude to God. It is a thank offering. A church member makes an offering in the church as a token of his offering of himself to God. The label 'Church Subscription' carries with it a secular aura that induces suspicion and corruption. This is responsible for many a misunderstanding about paying for the maintenance of the church as an institution. In the constitution of the Synod/Diocese/Pastorate, it may be provided that those members (not subscribers) who participate in the Lord's Supper regularly, make thank offerings (periodically in case of rural congregation depending on harvests) and take an active part in any of His Ministry, shall have the privilege of choosing are being chosen as Elders (not as pastorate committee members). Let us try to use the biblical language as much as possible—Elders-Local Elders-Area, Elders-Diocesan, Elders-Synod. The phrases such as Pastorate committee mislead people to think in terms of a political organization. Some Committee members are misled to behave like political party members. Ruling party, opposition party, floor crossing, horse trading based on caste, region, sub-region, language, friendship, socio-economic grouping, profession (Govt. servants, teachers, etc.) appear to creep into the church. The 'Committee' gives a wrong sense of status, power or recognition in society. We may say that the mere change of name may not be effective but the use of biblical language to a great extent followed by biblical teaching may bring the desired results. The 'Secretarian Churches' were successful in this direction. What is important is not mere change of labels but the realisation of the overall perspective of stewardship which rises above elections, power politics and personal reputation.

## B. Administration

The composition and structure of Church committees promote hollow and ineffective work (e.g.) Pastorate/Diocesan/Synod Committees tend to give more time for administrative, financial and legal matters than for 'people's programmes'. A Pastorate Committee is unable to think of work among the poor, the old, the sick; of the work of evangelism; of encouraging converts and providing support for children's education; of bringing reconciliation among people, and of the considering the programmes of the Sunday School, Women's Fellowship, Bible Study, Prayer groups etc. Brief reports of the elders'



Meetings may be presented in the Church services for information, reflection and action of the congregation. Since there is no suitable substitute for 'election' the congregation may be asked to choose (instead of the word election) 2/3 the Elders and they in turn may choose (coopt) 1/3 others considering their commitment, professional competence and experience, objectivity and such qualities. Let 50% of Church Elders be 'lay people' who are not employees of the Church and its institutions. The other 50% may be from clergy and full time lay workers of the church and members of Staff of Christian institutions. Otherwise there is a danger of inbreeding resulting in organic disabilities and chronic retardation in the life and work of the church at different levels. There may be a 'Resource Group' consisting of a few Diocesan Treasurers chosen for their personal integrity and professional experiences and of chosen financiers lawyers and professionals in an accounting, real estate development and financial administration, those who in addition are of proven trust worthiness and ecclesiastical knowledge who can study the resources, raise new resources examine the

programmes and allocate resources accordingly and objectively. These men and women may be called 'Elders for Resources'. They may work in consultation with the Diocesan Treasurers who may meet periodically to review their work. The change of nomenclature is to be considered as a starting point of a new thinking on the part of the members and for a new structure of the Church which integrate the spiritual and material resources.

#### Conclusion :

The Good News calls upon people to think, develop and promote the use of all resources for the glory of God and for the welfare of people as individuals and as a community at large. Worship, witness and service are inter-linked, and the resources are used in such a manner that these three aspects of the Ministry of Jesus Christ are fulfilled. He continues to challenge us to be stewards of trust.

### GALES OF CHANGE RESPONDING TO A SHIFTING MISSIONARY CONTEXT

The story of the London Missionary Society 1945-1977 Edited by Bernard Thorogood. Published by the World Council of Churches.

This book follows on from Norman Goodall's 1895-1945 LMS History, taking forward to 1977 the story of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Churches it helped to form. In the opening and closing chapters the general editor, Rev. Dr. Bernard Thorogood, paints in broad outline the features of this period of massive change and gives a critique of the LMS.

Different writers describe, against this background, how the mission organisation gave way to independent Churches and how these Churches joined in 1977 to form the Council for World Mission (CWM) as an international council committed to sharing resources for world mission. The focus in each area is on church life within the nation, not on the work of missionaries. The book has appendices with full lists of missionaries and associates who served through the LMS and CWM between 1945 and 1977.

BARRIE SCOPES

**Gales of Change** costs UK£11.50 plus £1 for postage and packing. Bulk quantities of over 20 copies will be charged at UK£7 each plus p & p. Please make cheques payable to : The Council for World Mission, and send to CWM Communication unit, Livingstone House, 11, Carteret Street, London SW1H 9DL, UK.



# The Women Around Jesus

Luke 8:1-3 and 23:55 24-10

MS. ALISON NORRIS M.C.O.D., London

I HAVE JUST RETURNED from India, where I met the Bible women of Madurai.

The Bible women are part of the Womens fellowship of the Church of South India. They are locally chosen, given, in most cases, a very little training, then go around their own and neighbouring villages offering a variety of ministry. One woman said simply that she organises meetings for women; many who come have been 'saved from the power of the evil spirit'. At these meetings she offers basic literacy teaching using a syllabus prepared by the Women's Fellowship. Another woman combines literacy teaching and health awareness in a number of small groups; this woman also teaches Kumi, a traditional form of circle dancing with sticks and singing. One group showed us the dance with which they had celebrated the feast of the Annunciation. Other women reported that they tried to raise awareness about ecological issues; one medically trained woman teaches hygiene, prenatal care. All encouraged the women with whom they worked to pray.

At the meeting I attended, a puppet show raised two issues which are a matter of concern to all the women I met in India. The first story was about the use of amniocentesis to determine the sex of a foetus, with subsequent pressure to terminate the pregnancy if the foetus is female; the other, very reminiscent of a Punch and Judy show, dealt with the issue of drunkenness, and violence against the family - there was both laughter and concern when the downtrodden and weeping wife finally snatched the stick and hit the drunken lout over the head!

This was Holy Week and on Good Friday evening I was taken to see a pageant, reminding me of when, as a child, I took part in the Coventry mystery plays. A whole hillside of red Indian earth had been carved into an arena for scenes from the Gospel, starting with the

Annunciation, and finishing with the Ascension. The production was magnificent; but, as with all such ventures, hitches did occur. As, for example, when the spotlight went out during the resurrection scene of the women meeting Jesus in the garden. They were left in darkness, while the light focused on the disciples down below, still huddled in their fear.

*In what way could this be seen as a parable of the way the church has focused attention, down the ages?*

The women in the gospels, like the Bible women of Madurai-Ramnad, were there throughout the life, death and resurrection of Christ, although the Gospel spotlight is seldom on them. They provide a ministry which is pastoral, evangelical, prophetic. They also provide the money-later in my visit to India I was impressed by how often, when I was told the story of how a church was built: the sacrificial giving of the women had made it possible.

*Can you think of similar examples, nearer home?*

It is not mere co-incidence that the first witnesses to the joyful and terrible new life, were the ones who had been the witnesses to the despairing and terrible death; that those whose basic care is for the needs of the body, even in death, are the first after the resurrection to receive the command to 'Go and Tell'. (Mark 16:7).

The Bible women of the Gospels : Mary, Salome, Mary, Joanna, Susanna and the Bible women of Madurai: Lalitha, Ratna, Sunderi, Mary, make no distinction between care of the body and care of the soul : prayer, puppets and prenatal care, food for the living, ointment for the dead, and telling of the resurrection, are all part of the provision made by women out of their own resources for the life of Christ in the World.



# NEWS FROM THE DIOCESES

## (i) KANYAKUMARI

### The Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band.

Evangelism ranks top in the priorities for the mission of the Church set a decade ago. Eventually, many dioceses reviving the original impetus, have taken up the issue with great enthusiasm and zeal. Evangelism, as we have widened its meaning and concept, bringing even the developmental and sociological aspects under its umbrella, is now being used even as a bridge to approach people of other faiths, not so much with an intention to convert them but to transform them to be better citizens. We believe that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit and the human efforts are only communicational. This attitude paves the way for creating a peaceful atmosphere for a harmonious living of all people in society.

With this balanced and relevant views, a missionary prayer band was formed in the diocese of Kanyakumari as early as in 1960 by a group of theological students who committed themselves to the task of communicating the gospel mostly to the unreached areas. Bishop I.R.H. Granadhason was its first president who helped this band to become part and parcel of the diocese.

Bishop G. Christdhas offered full support to this missionary prayer band and did his best to grow it into a full fledged missionary enterprise.

As many as 88 mission fields have been identified and about 120 workers are in full swing at various places stretching from Tamilnadu to Andhra Pradesh and even to Orissa. At present their work is mostly confined to the tribals living in the slopes of Kalrayan and Servarayan hills, with Serapattu, a small town, as their head quarters in South Arcot district of Tamilnadu. These tribals are said to have migrated from Kanjeeपुरam area after a clash among the leaders about 400 years ago. Until 1960 they were totally isolated, keeping themselves away from the pale of mainstream of society, practising strange customs and cherishing their own religious ideas. Dressing of any kind until the age of 15 was considered to be a sinful act!

Rev. D. Elias, one of the founders of the earlier prayer group, is the missionary-in-charge. His wife, Annabai Elias, is also a committed worker. Through her sincere services five young tribals accepted Jesus who became evangelists later on. There are 30 missionaries employed

in these areas who are in constant touch with the people which is yielding a rich harvest.

In July 94 Bishop Christdhas has commissioned Miss. Dhanakody Marlin, a Lambadi woman as missionary to work among women and children at Serapattu. She is the first Lambadi tribal woman missionary. She passed her school final and had a two years of theological college training.



*Dhanakody Marlin, the first lambadi woman missionary commissioned by Bishop G. Christdhas in July '94.*

Rev. A. Ramesh is another missionary working among Lambadi tribals in the area of Nagarjuna Sagar, Andhra Pradesh. He is supported by the prayer band. Collaborating with the United Christian Missionary Society of India (started by CMS); National Missionary Society; Indian Evangelical mission, there are 10 missionaries working in Orissa, Gujarat, Bijapur, Bangalore and Madras. This, in my opinion, is an example of the untold story of the evangelistic power of ecumenical venture.

The band, being mindful of the medical needs of the people in the remote areas of the hills, has now opened clinics with two doctors and two nurses. Besides, 30 schools are also managed by the Prayer Band — out of these only 9 schools get Govt. aid, the rest are run by the diocese. There are two well kept up tribal children homes which teach, apart from christian nurture, cleanliness and good discipline.



Thus, the missionary prayer band, although the name gives slightly a different picture, specially when we are surrounded by many evangelical and pentecostal groups with such names, is an excellent form of expressing and living out the faith. The movement that was born out of the missionary enterprise the desire to spread and share the faith — is doing more justice to the neglected lot of the society by attempting to transform the lives of the people living in the unreached areas.

This prayer band is a department of the diocese — a wing of mission and evangelism, if we may say so. It has its own budget touching Rs. 20,00,000/- not to mix it up with the budget of the diocese. Where does this huge amount come from? The answer is simple — from the local resources, although the process of getting it is an herculean task. They have four promotional workers: Mr. G. Christopher Daniel; Mr. A. Robin N. Doss; Mr. G. Sam Gilbert Rajan and Mrs. N. Jeevi (Bible woman). Their main job is to approach individuals, families and congregations explain the work of the band, convince them of the importance of their support and participation and raise funds. Last year, these four persons through their vigorous campaign, raised an amount of Rs. 19,00,000/- an unbelievable figure for many of us!

Here I see VELCOM in practice. Many local congregations pool their resources and sponsor the missionaries by meeting all their financial needs. Marthandam Church, for example, is providing financial help to four workers. Christ church in Nagercoil is helping Rev. D. Elias who is working in serapattu. Home Church, Nagercoil, lends all the help to Mr. Pon Justin Raj working in Pudur Kalrayan Miss. V. Dhanakody Merlin, the newly commissioned missionary is being supported by the staff of the Neyyur Hospital. 50 women in Nagercoil support Rev. C.A. Singh working in Orissa. Many families and individuals are all out to support missionaries and the promotional workers thus involving themselves in the promotion of the evangelistic work. They have Annual Thanks giving day Agape, which brings many partners together, organise sales, speak about the activities and enjoy fellowship — are some of the features of the day.

In all these I find transparency in relations and in the sharing of responsibilities which pave the way to the recognition that all God's gifts are common property and as such have to be shared.

Thanks to Bishop Christdhas who had arranged a meeting for me with the office staff, promotional workers and Rev. D. Elias at Nagercoil. I had the privilege of meeting with Mr. D. Yesu Gnanadhas, the Secretary, Mr. Starling Samuel, the Treasurer, Mr. Stanley Jones and the other member who were very cooperative in passing on the needed information.

— DASS BABU

## (ii) TIRUNELVELI

**MEN'S FELLOWSHIP :** The 14th Anniversary of the diocesan men's fellowship was celebrated on three days i.e. 12th 13th and 14th of August at the Caldwell Higher Secondary school, Tuticorin.

In the year 1980, the diocese celebrated the bicentenary of the formation of the Christian church in the area of Tirunelveli. As one of the programmes of the Church an important decision was taken to form mens fellowship. It was formally inaugurated on that occasion with the motto, **PRAYER, FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE**. Thank God, now this fellowship is a well established organisation in almost all the congregations in the diocese. Thanks to Bishop Jason Dharmaraj and many senior workers of the Church for the cooperation and hard work they put in to encourage the fellowship to function well, and to accomplish its motto.

About 300 representatives from various congregations took part in the three day celebrations arranged at Tuticorin in August. During the celebrations there were one-act plays and dramas enacted on some of the burning issues like dowry system, drug addiction, and corruption.

The celebrations also provided opportunity for all the incharge persons of the auxiliaries to share the stories of their activities. some of the stories are very encouraging. The branch at St. patrick's Church Tuticorin is supporting 15 blind and 6 deaf persons by paying Rs. 40/- per month for each of them. The Holy Trinity Church at Sawyarpuram supplies dresses to the inmates of the Old Age Home (Karunai Illam) at Thirumavaiyur.

After a long time of negotiations a special standing committee has been formed. Bishop Jason Dharmaraj was kind enough to spare one presbyter as a full time director to motivate the congregations to function effectively through the men's fellowship.

A rolling shield was awarded to Kailasapuram for Scripture Knowledge.

— Rev. R. Pitchamuthu

## (iii) SOUTH KERALA

### Diofest - 94

The South Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India celebrated its third annual diocesan festival namely **STOTHROTSAV - 94** (A celebration of Thanksgiving) with much enthusiasm. The theme for this year's celebration was dedication, witness and celebration. Thousands of believers gathered at the L.M.S. Compound, Trivandrum from 12th September to 15th September 1994 in connection with the celebration. It was an occasion of Christian witness and rededication. 'In a plural society like ours, we are called to be the carriers of justice and peace which



are the basic values of the kingdom of God, we are given very special opportunities to be the effective missionaries of the gospel in the midst of disharmony and hatredness. Each and everyone of the diocese should carefully identify their own responsibilities in serving the church and society in a better way with a unique commitment. Also we need to understand the new challenges in the christian ministry in this part of our country. Our readiness to be thankful to God for all that we have, will enable us to find the real meaning of this festival.' Said Rt. Rev. Dr. Samuel Amirtham who chaired the inaugural meeting. Sri. A. Charles M.P (Former secretary of the Diocese) declared the festival open. In his address, he stressed the significance of upholding secularism in all our activities.

Almost all the churches in the diocese participated in the Diofest by bringing vegetables, fancy items, pickles and other offerings. In addition to this there were about fifteen stalls run by various institutions of the diocese. Thousands of people visited the stalls irrespective of caste and creed.

A variety of cultural programmes had been arranged by the festival committee in the evenings. The most attractive item was 'Mass Choir' in which about 700 singers sung together indicating the oneness and common commitment of the diocese. The members were from all parts of the diocese. The famous 'KALAIKAVERI' of Trichy diocese of the Catholic Church presented a Dance Feast on 13th September, — Gospel through music and dance and it was well received by the public. The communication department of the diocese released a cassette including ten songs on the theme justice and ecology. Mosawalsalam Sastriar Cultural Centre of the diocese arranged a concert on Mosawalsalam songs. The talented students of the Blind and Deaf Schools of the diocese entertained the crowd. Prayermeetings and renewal meetings were also conducted.

The participation of the local people and the imaginative leadership definitely helped the diocese to move forward. It was indeed an occasion of fellowship,

worship, celebration and thanksgiving. The journey from 'No-people hood' to 'people hood' of the diocese has not been trouble free but thrilling. We really believe we could communicate the values of the gospel through such celebrations.

— David Joy

#### (iv) KARNATAKA NORTHERN DIOCESE

##### Women's Rally at Hubli

To mark the celebration of the formation of Church of South India, the 4th Anniversary, One day Retreat was organised for women at St. Peter's Church, CSI, Hubli on 27th September, 1994. More than 1200 Women attended this Retreat. It was commenced with the Holy Communion Service celebrated by the Rev. James Talapati, presbyter of St. Peter's Church, assisted by Rev. Manohar. Mrs. Tabitha Vasant Dandin, President, women's fellowship of the Karnataka Northern Diocese spoke on the challenges the women in the Church are facing today. Rev. Paul Kattebennur was one of the speakers. A fellowship dinner was arranged for are of them. The women from the other denominations too were invited to participate in this Retreat. All the women took active part in all the sessions.

The afternoon session was led by the Rev. J. Prabhakara Rao, Area Chairman, N.K. 'A' Area and spoke on 'women's issues and Empowerment'. A skit was presented by the women's fellowship of the St. Peters Church, Hubli. There was a time for singing, praying and fellowship. This one day Retreat helped many women to come together and commit themselves for the mission and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank our Bishop and the Moderator Most Rev. Dr. Vasant P. Dandin for his Blessings and encouragement for sorting out the women's problems in the diocese.

Rev. J. Prabhakara Rao  
Area Chairman



# NEWS FROM ALL OVER

**'Rigid' Vatican letter on women priests causes Lutherans concern**

GENEVA—The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which has 119 member churches around the world, has expressed deep concern about Pope John Paul II's letter which ruled out the ordination of women priests in the Roman Catholic Church.

The LWF described the Pope's letter as 'rigid', adding that Lutheran theology had already discounted the Vatican's objections to the ordination of women.

Many — but not all — churches in the LWF ordain women pastors.

The Pope's apostolic letter, addressed to bishops of his church, was released on 30 May. In it the Pope stated: 'I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgement is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful.'

The Pope's letter was apparently an attempt to close dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church on the issue of women priests, but individuals and organisations both within the church and outside it, have said that dialogue must continue.

Meeting in Geneva in June, 94 the LWF council adopted a letter previously released by the LWF's general secretary, Gunnar Staalsett, which stated: 'The theology behind our Lutheran practice of ordaining women — we have done it for decades now — discounts the Roman arguments. We wonder whether [the Pope's letter] will undermine the ecumenical dialogue by its rigid claim regarding truth and by what seems to be an attempt to remove the question of ordaining women as priests from the ecumenical agenda. It is our conviction that it is precisely in ecumenical discussion that the Holy Spirit can lead us to new insights into the holy scriptures.'

The LWF council also declared that the Pope's letter has shown that the issue of the ordination of women 'remains a serious ecumenical barrier on the road to full communion'. Roman Catholic/Lutheran dialogue on the issue must continue, the LWF council said.

Staalsett told journalists at a press conference in Geneva in June: 'If the Vatican believes the issue of

ministry can be set aside in ecumenical dialogue, we cannot follow that. And if we cannot discuss women's ordination, we cannot discuss ministry.'

**Islam and Christianity have 'Top Growth Rates'**

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS — Islam and Christianity enjoyed the highest percentage growth rate of all world religions between 1980 and 1992, according to research by the Rockford Institute on Religion and Society.

In its monthly publication, *The Religion and Society Report*, the institute reported that the number of Muslims grew by 30.5 per cent in that period, reflecting the very high birth rates in northern and central Africa and several Middle East countries where Islam is the religion of most of the population. The report said, however, that Islam was gaining substantial numbers of converts in several non-Islamic countries.

Christianity, the report said, was also gaining 'a modest number of conversions'. Its percentage growth rate between 1980 and 1992 was also 30.5.

The growth rate for atheists and non-believers was estimated at 29 per cent, rising from 911 million people in 1980 to 1175 million in 1992. During that period, the world's population as a whole rose, according to the report, by 29.8 per cent.

In the same period the number of Hindus grew by 28.8 per cent, while the number of Buddhist increased by 21.9 per cent.

Out of step with the increase rates for other major religions was the growth in the number of followers of Judaism which increased by only six per cent, from 17 million to 18 million.

Meanwhile, further claims about the growth of evangelical churches in Latin America suggest they will have more than 100 million members by the year 2000. A recent article in *Latin America Press* said that the astonishing growth of evangelical churches in Latin America, from 50,000 members in 1900 to about 40 million in 1990, was making the traditional Protestant and Roman Catholic churches anxious.

(EPS)



# Recent writings on Dalit Theology

## A Bibliographical Essay

REV. JOHN PARRATT

(Continued from July Issue)

### The Dalit Desiyata

Abraham Ayrookuzhiel has brought together in his *The Dalit Desiyata: The Kerala Experience in Development and Class struggle* (ISPCK for CISRS, Delhi 1990) a number of papers that address the very specific situation in Kerala. His own contribution, which reflects the title of the book: *Dalits Move Towards an Ideology of Nationality*, is a brilliant summary of (in his own words) 'the basic ideas, values and perceptions of this energising consciousness which we call Dalit ideology.' For Ayrookuzhiel, though dalits are not a 'nation' in the technical sense, the term can rightly be applied to them. Though they are a people deprived of an alienated from their own history, culture and languages, these are recoverable both from their oral traditions and from the written literature of their brahmanical oppressors. Thus the recovery of their historical consciousness, and a clear delineation of the historical process by which they became an oppressed people, are necessary preliminary steps towards the struggle for dalit identity and liberation.

The 'nationhood' of dalits consists in a common experience of political and social oppression. In this respect the cultural and social renewal movements in India in the past, which were led by caste Indians or foreigners, however well meaning, failed to address the real problems of dalits. In a series of well researched and well-argued essays, the contributors to *The Dalit Desiyata* clearly demonstrate the failure of government compensatory schemes to improve the lot of dalits. The cynical manipulation of dalits by the communists in Kerala is especially remarkable. Having ridden into power on the back of the dalit vote the record of the communist administration in Kerala, contributes a particularly perceptive piece highlighting the most pressing issues of the dalit predicament as landlessness and land alienation, and pinpointing the shortcomings of the reservation policy. This collection of essays as a whole more than justifies Ayrookuzhiel's conclusion that the development and integration of dalits with the rest of the country have

failed to take place, despite central government effort and investment, simply because of the continuance of an ingrained caste consciousness and ideology. *The Dalit Desiyata* is breaking new ground in the serious engagement of theology with the findings of the social sciences. This hard fact approach needs to be probed further, and in a pan-Indian context, to provide even more raw materials in the struggle to formulate dalit theology.

### The Gurukul Lutheran contribution to the debate

The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute has distinguished itself by opening a separate department of dalit theology, which has produced two symposia, both edited by Arvind P. Nirmal (neither volume is dated). *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology* contains papers presented at the college in 1989. As the title implies, the aims of this conference was to search for a common ideology that would bring together the aspiration of the many dalit groups in India. Such an ideology, it was agreed (p. 128), would need to be the result of the awakening of the consciences of all dalits — non-Christian as well as Christian — to the value of their history and culture, which have been systematically distorted and suppressed by the dominant Aryan castes. The aims of this ideology would be two-fold: on the one hand it would reject and combat the denial of dalit human dignity and their social and economic deprivation, and on the other it would vigorously contend for their just human rights. It is therefore a task both of the reconstruction of a submerged and denigrated heritage, and also of an active struggle that is both idealistic and practical.

This, the conference believed, was a task for all dalits, despite their differences in language and religion; it was also a task in which tribal peoples — that other group of 'indigenous' non-Aryans — should share. One particular aspect of this struggle (to which reference will be made in more detail below) is that of raising the status of dalit women, the 'thrice oppressed' — in the home, in the church, and in society as a whole. For Christian dalits the theological basis of the struggle has to be the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.



The final statement of the meeting affirmed that a common dalit ideology must be guided, corrected and transformed by what it calls an 'incarnational ideology' (p. 131). In this respect the church warrants severe criticism for its dehumanizing caste structures and for its reluctance to speak out against acts of violence perpetrated against dalits. The incarnational ideology of which this statement speaks is not seen as confined to any one group, nor even to the church. 'It is meant for the whole of humanity; for it is rooted in the humanity of Jesus' (p. 132). The idea expressed here is a characteristic one in Indian theology, that the church does not have a monopoly on Jesus Christ, and that all that makes for a truer humanity is part of the realization of the kingdom of God.

In line with this approach, *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology* looks at anti-brahmanical protest movements through Indian history, and sees in them a powerful encouragement for Christian dalits (and indeed all Christians) to participate fully alongside the oppressed in the common struggle for justice and for human rights.

A second volume from Gurukul provides us with a handy teaching text and source book. All the papers reprinted in *A Reader in Dalit Theology* have appeared before, several of them in books reviewed in this article. But it also includes some less easily accessible contributions. V. Davasahayam, in *Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness*, provides an excellent introduction to the various factors that circumscribe the dalit situation. Dayanand Carr's article is a provocative exercise in dalit hermeneutics, which takes the 'Galilee' of Matthew's Gospel as a paradigm for dalit theology. There are also two foundational papers by Nirmal, *Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective* and *Toward a Christian Dalit Theology*. The former also appears in *Emergent Dalit Theology*, edited by Xavier Irudayaraj, a symposium containing papers resulting from collaboration between the Madras Jesuit Theological Seminary and Tamilnadu Theological Seminary at Madurai (1990). This volume is particularly strong on the historical dimension. It includes an overview of missionary attitudes to caste as well as useful treatments of Periyar, Ambedkar and Gandhi on the dalit issue.

#### M. Azariah

Azariah is one of the few dalit theologians whose writings have appeared in more substantial form. Azariah served the Church of South India in rural and urban pastorates for many years, and also in various community and educational positions, before being called to be bishop of Madras, where he has been an indefatigable promoter of the dalit cause. His earlier book, *Witnessing in India Today* (published by the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches, Madras 1983), brought together exegetical studies, seminar papers, and articles on a number of aspects of witness. Witness, according to Azariah, is four-fold:

evangelistic, social, political and global. Already in this book he was exploring issues such as the need for socio-economic development and the role of basic ecclesial communities. The predicament of the Scheduled Castes is highlighted in two chapters. 'The biblical basis for the church's concern for the discriminated sections within its own body' (which first appeared in 1979) draws attention to the fact that compensatory benefits provided for in the constitution were denied to Christian dalits. Thus they were faced with a double injustice in that they were not accorded preferential treatment as Scheduled Castes by government, but at the same time continued to be discriminated against within a caste-ridden church. 'Injustice and discrimination against Christians of scheduled caste origin' (1978), like many of Azariah's writings, is important because of its exposition of the biblical and theological basis for liberation from caste oppression.

Six years later a further volume of Azariah's collected writings appeared under the title *Mission in Christ's Way in India Today* (CLS for CSI, Madras, 1989). This book sharpens the focus on the dalit issue. Again there is a mix of biblical exposition and socio-political analysis, brought together by Azariah's conviction that both the biblical text and the life context are essential to theology — 'Christian mission,' he writes, 'is precisely bringing together the Texts of Scripture to bear upon the contexts of the society where Christians are living' (p. 86). Taking his cue from John 20:19ff, he sees the mandate for mission as essentially trinitarian, in the actual presence of Father, Son and Spirit through the Risen Christ. Focussing on the use of *ochlos* in Mark, he would understand ministry as not merely an option or bias towards the poor but 'literally and physically siding with the poor.' Thus 'mission in Christ's way must mean mission focus on the least in any society' (p. 7). In India this means the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Azariah's writings bring together a number of themes that are characteristic of dalit theology: the need to rewrite history from a dalit perspective, the rape of their culture, traditions, and dignity by Aryan conquest and brahmanical priestcraft, the institutionalized poverty of the bottom quarter of India's population, the necessity of awakening the conscience to break free from the stranglehold of a slave mentality.

#### Dalit women

In contrast to Latin American liberation theology and American black theology, which almost entirely ignored feminist issues in their early stages, dalit theology from its inception has had a deep and compassionate concern to hear the voice of women. Already in Prabhakar's book, Ruth Manorama and Swarnalatha Devi had drawn attention to the appalling lot of the 'dalits of the dalits.' On top of caste oppression, dalit women suffer from additional



exploitation, which is rooted in the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Women and women's sexuality are regarded as impure and threatening (though ironically this does not prevent over eighty percent of rapes being perpetrated against dalit women, mainly by upper caste men). They are subjected to domestic violence and unremitting drudgery in the home and to abuse in society at large. Some of the most moving of the testimonies in Prabhakar's book graphically reveal the misery — but also the faith — of dalit women. Aruna Gnanadason's 'Dalit Women, the Dalit of the Dalit' (which also appears in both the *Reader* and *Ideology*) takes as its point of departure the use of violence against dalit women as a means of caste control, and exposes the religious, as well as the historical, roots of such violence. *Dalits and Women* (a third volume to come from Gurukul Seminary, containing the papers of its 1992 Summer Institute) devotes almost half of its space to women's issues. Several of the contributions deal with socio-economic questions, such as the chasm between caste and non-caste women, the marginalized status of women in Hindu society as a whole despite modern legal enactments, and the social evils attendant upon the dowry system, even among Christians.

Rajammal Devadas and Padmini Swaminatha address developmental issues, the lack of progress in women's health care and education, the debilitating influence of androcentric planning, and the stereo typing of the role

of women. A more pronouncedly theological approach is presented by Prasanna Samuel who exposes the neglect of women within the churches, and draws attention to examples of shocking abuse of Christian women at the hands of a male dominated ecclesiastical leadership. The paper by Rani Moses indicates some of the avenues that are available for the empowering of women in the Indian situation.

Dalit theology is at yet in its embryonic stage, and we await its full scale development. But eloquent and passionate spokesmen and spokeswoman are there, with a deep commitment to the marginalized of society and of the Indian church, and to forging out a theological basis for action. Above all, such spokespersons are emerging from within the dalit community itself. Though the caste situation is unique to the Indian subcontinent, the theological lessons to be learned from the theological thinking that has arisen from the confrontation with caste oppression are of much wider application, and will be relevant wherever discrimination in terms of race, birth or class is encountered.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am grateful to the Rev. Austine Andrews and to the Very Rev. Dr. Dan O'Connor, both for the loan of materials that would not otherwise have been available to me and for sharing their insights on dalit theology.



## The XIV Free Eye Camp at St. Luke's Leprosarium, Peikulam

A Free Eye camp was held at St. Luke's Leprosarium, Peikulam near Sattankulam by Dr. V.P. Sukumar and Dr. Vasanthy, Eye specialists of Government Hospital, Tuticorin and Tiruchendur respectively led by Mr. Siva Somanathan, Co-Ordinator, Blindness Control Society, Tuticorin, Chidambaranar District.

The preliminary screening was done at the Leprosarium on the 14th September '94. Ninety seven patients (among whom 46 were leprosy subjects) were screened and five selected for surgery which was performed at the Government Hospital, Tiruchendur.

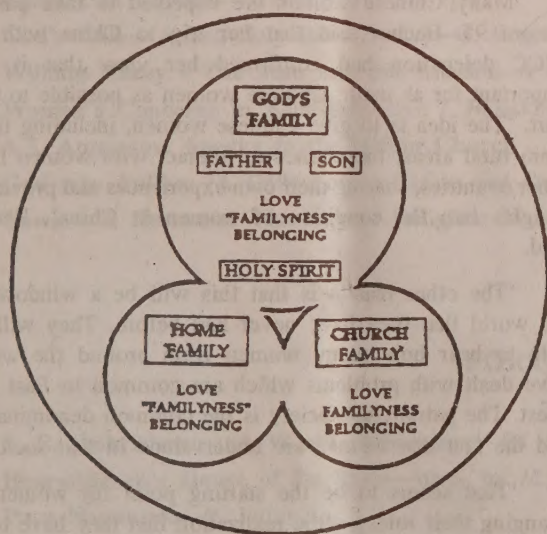
The treatment and service including to & fro transport were completely free.

G.M. Jeyabalan,  
Medical Superintendent



## Circles of familyness

The *International Year of the Family* has alerted people to the imperative of saving the family. It has been said that the family is a key contemporary question that must be addressed by the church. Not only is a belief in the integrity of family a fundamental part of our Christian faith, it is also a basic conviction of the vast majority of our fellow citizens. As such it provides one of the few real points of contact between Christian values and the hopes of the average secular person.



### The circle of God's family

Within this family circle there are three persons who live in unified and interactive harmony. Together they constitute wholeness and unity. Central to this image of God's family is love in its purest form. The three project a picture of God who is love. When God made mankind in his own image the only thing he could do was to provide a family similar to his own. Through his grace, Jesus provided a way of salvation for his people, offering to transform their weaknesses and adopt them into his family. He provided them with the model and the empowerment to implement God's original intention for the family. Therefore, Christians have before them the pattern of what a Christian family should be and the power to live by the pattern.

### The circle of the home family

Ideally the Christian family can be considered a reflection of God's family in society. In the 1993 St James

massacre in Cape Town, gunmen burst into the church and mowed down 11 people and seriously injured many others. A Russian seaman, previously an atheist was there and told of his interaction with a Christian family, in which the mother was killed. Said he, 'I've been a seaman for 28 years and never in that time have I met such warm and kindhearted people as Marita and David Ackerman'. Because of the reflection of God in this family, the atheist came to faith. For a family to be Christian, its members individually and corporately need to seek God within the family, enter into his lifestyle of love, familyness and belonging and derive the power needed to be a Christian family.

### The circle of the church family

Biblical times were characterised by a corporate personality, in which the individual person was merged into a larger group of family, clan or nation. Jewish homes were usually extended families and belonging to the family of Israel was a powerful motivation. Christians felt a deep sense of belonging to their home families, and churches in their homes. The fact that the early church developed in the homes of believers must have done a great deal to develop this sense of intimate belonging.

Like the home family, the church family struggled to achieve the ideal. There were frictions, factions and feelings that spoilt things. When the family of God's people consciously and with commitment seek to take on the revealed character of God's family, a warm place of love, familyness and belonging is provided for people who are operating in an other-wise cold, self centered and competitive world. In this environment, as people discover the broader family of God's people, especially in worship, they will find motivation for growth in their own families and an atmosphere for transmitting faith to their children.

### The circle of familyness

To understand and experience the true meaning of family it is imperative for : each circle to touch sides with each of the other circles; each circle to experience the love and belonging that emanates from the others, so that the entire system is deeply influenced by interacting relationships. As each circle influences the other, a sense of familyness develops and an enormous potential for the inter flow of spiritual dynamics transpires.

— News Share



# WCC to promote participation by Chinese women

The world council of Churches (WCC) intends to sponsor the participation of 100 women — 50 of them Chinese — at Forum 95, a conference to discuss progress on conditions for women, to be held in Beijing in late August next year.

Jeanne Becher, assistant to the general secretary of the WCC, said, after visiting churches and church women in China as part of a WCC delegation, that attendance at Forum 95 was vital for Chinese women as it would give them 'international exposure and the chance to talk to other women with whom they share common concerns'.

Forum 95, which will bring together thousands of women from women's groups linked to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world, will be held from August 30 to September 8, overlapping with the fourth United Nations Conference on Women (September 4-15), also taking place in Beijing.

The forum will be a curtain-raiser for the UN conference, discussing advances for women in UN member states around the world in the decade since 1985 when the third UN Conference on Women in Nairobi drew up its report, 'Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women'.

About 20,000 women took part in the NGO forum in Nairobi in 1985 which preceded the second UN Conference on Women.

As well as sending 100 women to Forum 95, the WCC, which is an NGO affiliated to the UN, has the possibility of contributing to the UN Conference on Women.

Becher said that the WCC women's desk was co-ordinating the WCC participation in the forum, in consultation with other WCC desks. The WCC was also planning five workshops at Forum 95, on refugee and migrant women, gospel and cultures, women and AIDS, women suffering under racism, and young women against violence.

The WCC is working with the World YWCA and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations

(WUCWO) to help Chinese women set up a hospitality centre at the forum, where women can meditate, have tea and coffee, and meet to talk. A daily panel, called Church Women Respond, will be held at the hospitality centre, enabling Christian women to discuss and respond to issues raised at the forum.

Many Chinese women are expected to take part in Forum 95. Becher said that her trip to China with the WCC delegation had confirmed her view that it was important for as many Chinese women as possible to take part. 'The idea is to give Chinese women, including those from rural areas, the chance to interact with women from other countries, sharing their own experiences and providing insights into the condition of women in China', Becher said.

'The other reason is that this will be a window on the world that they have never had before. They will be able to hear how many women from around the world have dealt with problems which are common to East and West. The patriarchal society is the common denominator, and the fact that women are undervalued in that society'.

'That seems to be the starting point for women in changing their roles — the realization that they have been created equal in the sight of God and that there is no justification for their being relegated to second place.'

Becher said that the 'big question' about the participation of Chinese women in the WCC's contingent at Forum 95 was, given that it would take place in a little over a year, their ability to communicate in English, which will be the forum's working language. 'The Beijing Christian Council is already giving accelerated English courses to women,' Becher said.

On the condition of women in China, Becher, who particularly focused on women's issues during the China visit by the WCC delegation, said: 'Without exception, those women I met spoke about widespread attitudes to women that keep them from realizing their full potential.'

— E.P.S.



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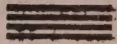
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